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*Thoughts on some particular PASSAGES in the Agamemnon  
of ÆSCHYLUS.*

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IN Mr. Wood's Essay on Homer there is the following passage: Read Dec.  
" That we may conclude from him (that is, Homer) that the <sup>20, 1788.</sup>  
" language of Greece was that of Troy."

SEVERAL writers have concurred with Mr. Wood in this opinion. The principal reason which they assign for it, independent of the supposed affinity and connection between the countries, is this: That in all the interviews which take place in the Iliad between the warriors of both nations, the speakers seem to understand each other perfectly well, without the intervention of an interpreter, a personage who in short never appears throughout the whole poem; that as Homer has transmitted to us such a faithful copy of the manners of this very early period of society, and has not suffered any incident or circumstance to escape him which could perfect the resemblance, and mark the characters of individuals as well as of nations with precision, it is inconsistent with the accuracy of so great a painter not to have taken

taken notice of the different language made use of by Greece and Troy, if any such difference had really subsisted.

THIS argument appears at first to be perfectly conclusive. Homer's great consistency, his historical truth, his unvarying attention to the costume in every instance, cannot be doubted. His total silence in the Iliad, as to the language of Greece and Troy, certainly favours the idea that it must have been common to both countries. Strongly fortified and supported as this idea seems to be, I think I shall be able to prove that it had not always that currency which it has now: That the greatest tragic poet Athens ever saw (the greatest incontrovertibly in point of original genius) entertained a different opinion, is a certain fact, in which conjecture has no room. From some circumstances which I shall mention in the course of this essay, we may reasonably presume that the people of Athens concurred in opinion with him.

IN the Agamemnon of *Æschylus*, which, take it all together, is one of his most finished compositions, he introduces that monarch as just returned from the destruction of Troy to his palace at Argos. Agreeable to the fashion of those heroic ages, when a general urbanity of manners had not softened the horrors of war, he is attended by a train of unhappy captives. The principal figure in this group is Cassandra, the celebrated and wretched daughter of Priam. She appears before Clytemnestra, and the principal old men of Argos who compose the chorus. The queen addresses her in a mixed strain of courtesy and severity. The miserable princess makes no answer. At length Clytemnestra

temnestra becomes impatient, and tells her if she does not understand their language to make signs with her hands. The chorus then observes that she comes from a foreign city, and stands in need of an interpreter. This checks the rising anger of the queen, who goes into the palace to sacrifice, as she says, to the Gods, for Agamemnon's happy return. As soon as Clytemnestra had retired, Cassandra no longer preserves silence, but with a noble wildness and dignity of sorrow invokes Apollo as the author of all her calamities. She then proceeds to prophesy her own death and that of Agamemnon. The chorus are at first all amazement; however, when they have in some degree recovered from that astonishment and terror into which the terrific frenzy and ambiguous forebodings of the beautiful prophetess have thrown them, they express their surprize that a foreigner, as she is, could speak the Grecian language as fluently as if she had been educated at Argos. Again, when continuing her prophecies, the chorus confess their utter inability to comprehend her meaning, she immediately replies, " Yet you allow that I speak your language perfectly." All this is so strongly marked, and the difference between the Trojan and Grecian tongues so distinctly pointed out, that it is impossible not to take notice of it.

We have here then a celebrated dramatic poet, the father of tragedy, who not only does not allot the same language to the queen of Agamemnon and the daughter of Priam, but thinks it proper to represent the natives of Argos as surprized and confounded that the latter should speak their language at all. Can we suppose that if at that time it was generally admitted as true,

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that

that the Grecians and Trojans spoke the same language, that he would have hazarded such an unnecessary violation of historical truth, and before such judges? Can we suppose that a poet, who above all others was the avowed admirer of Homer; who, with that unaffected diffidence which ever characterizes real genius, always spoke of his tragedies as single dishes from the great entertainment of Homer, would have deviated from him in so material a point if he really imagined that Homer considered his countrymen and the Trojans as using the same language?

THE magnanimity of Agamemnon, and the misfortunes of Cassandra, certainly have no relation to this circumstance; yet I am persuaded that *Aeschylus* did not mention it without design. Such minutiae fall more generally, though not more properly, within the historic than the tragic sphere; for we may observe that uninteresting authors who write for the theatre, without the true genuine talents for it (a case by no means uncommon) never attend to such minutiae in the least, and that a real dramatic genius always does. It is this which constitutes the great difference between the French theatre and that theatre which Shakespear established. Corneille, whose Roman characters in general are only so many gigantic disproportioned statues of the Pompeys and the Emiliani, “stept from their pedestals to take the air,” and who seems always unhappy when he is not indulging his passion for declamation, and quoting Lucan, looked down from his dramatic rostrum on such seeming trifles with the utmost contempt; whilst Shakespear, on the contrary, selects them with the utmost assiduity and taste; well knowing that they gave that air of truth and probability to his pieces which is the very soul of

of theoretic representation. Now if such a master as Æschylus has thought fit, in the midst of a most interesting and impassioned scene, on a sudden to check the tide of our feelings, to bid the most powerful passions to stand still for a moment whilst he calls our attention to such a minute circumstance as this, will it appear chimerical or visionary to say that he touched on it because it was exactly agreeable to the popular opinion of the antient limits of the Greek language, and of course necessary to the historical perfection of his drama; and that his judgment, as well as Shakespear's, told him that it is this minute and delicate conformity to established traditions which affixes the seal of authenticity to the works of the poet.

IT may be said that the drama of Æschylus is not always perfectly regular, and that the Athenians did not look for that correctness which an acquaintance with the works of his great rival Sophocles taught them afterwards to exact. It is true. Æschylus was crowned for this play of Agamemnon, and yet there is one material and palpable error in it. The last of the successive signals by fire, which was agreed to be given immediately on the taking of Troy, has been scarcely seen by the watchman who was stationed to observe them, and their progress described (most beautifully indeed) by Clytemnestra, when Agamemnon himself appears at Argos. This is certainly a violation of all probability. However, I believe it will be admitted that an audience might with great facility overlook a trespass on the unities, and not pass over any inattention to a matter of public notoriety, as I should suppose that of Greece speaking a different language from Troy, must in some degree have been at Athens. I acknowledge

that the Athenians were a people fond even to a proverb of fiction and romance; that they frequently adopted and maintained opinions relative to antient customs, &c. without any foundation: I acknowledge that the most impartial of all historians, Thucydides, freely declares his apprehensions that his account of the Peleponnesian war will not please, on account of the attachment of the Athenians to fable. But although it might have been matter of dispute at Athens whether Iphigenia was really sacrificed at Aulis or not, yet whether their ancestors and the Trojans spoke the same language was a question not confined to the poets; it related to the whole community, and consequently, whatever distance of time there was between the taking of Troy and the days of Æschylus, could not have been involved in much obscurity.

THE works of Homer were not confined to a particular class in society; they were not read by historians, or philosophers, or statesmen alone. If they were studied by Anaxagoras or Pericles, or applauded by the uncommon sense and superior taste of Aspasia, they were at the same time the delight and the instruction of the multitude: They were, as every one knows, recited at the sacred festivals; their authority was admitted as unquestionable in judicial pleadings. It is scarcely possible to suppose that a people so penetrating, so inquisitive, so ingenious as the Athenians, could have been so conversant as they were with the works of Homer without investigating a question the most natural that could occur to them on reading that poet; did the Greeks and the Trojans use the same language? If the times in which the tragedies of Æschylus were acted with peculiar approbation

bation had been clouded with barbarism or ignorance, it would have been idle to have touched on this question for a moment ; but the days in which this great poet was most admired, were, above all others in the history of Greece, peculiarly resplendent. Never did the genius of Athens appear with more dazzling lustre than just at that period. The age of Demosthenes, of Hyperides and Alexander, was the age of eloquence, and to a certain degree of the fine arts ; but with such predominating splendour did the period which I allude to shine forth, that no subsequent æra in the annals of mankind has, in some instances, at all equalled it. It was amidst this intellectual blaze, “ in this most high and “ palmy state” of Greece, that the tragedies of Æschylus laid hold on the Athenian mind ; and though he was exceeded by Sophocles in regularity and elegance, and by Euripides in tenderness and moral sentiment, yet the uncommon force of poetry with which he had elucidated and adorned the more shadowy and uncertain parts of Grecian story, and the noble patriotism and magnificence of numbers with which he cloathed the illustrious day of Salamis in double lustre, rendered him the object of delight and admiration to his countrymen. Perhaps if we consider for a moment the nature of those subjects which form the tragedies of those great poets, we may be induced to pay more attention to the sentiments of Æschylus, as far as they relate to the present question. The misfortunes of

“ Thebes, or Pelops line,  
“ Or the tale of Troy divine,”

seem to be the general and indeed inexhaustible source from whence they all drew their richest materials : Sophocles, and  
Euripides,

Euripides, however, more particularly. In the drama of the former, the woes of Oedipus, of Electra, and perhaps more than either, the awakened tenderness and self-condemnation of Deianira, lay claim to and engage all our sensibility. The splendour and elegance of the poetry, the judicious selection of the fable, and peculiar correctness of taste for which this poet has been so justly celebrated, must be obvious to the most careless observer. In Euripides, the poet of the heart, we are charmed with the easy and artless simplicity of his diction, the elevated yet appropriate sentiments of each chorus, and the mild philosophy of Socrates which glides through and enriches the whole. The tragedies of Æschylus wear a different from ; irregular, often extravagant, more sublime and magnificent in his conceptions than either of his rivals ; it is not the dignified sufferings of Hercules, the solitudes of Lemnos re-echoing to the anguish of Philoctetes, the unhappy passion of Phædra, or the graceful and resigned tenderness of Alcestis, that solicit the exertions of his muse. A predilection for whatever was august, awful and commanding, for those subjects which were almost hid in antiquity, and by the developement of which he could pour new light on the history and manners of his countrymen, seem to pervade almost the whole of his favourite compositions. In his Prometheus, the gloom, the dread uncertainty which reign through part of that sublime performance, the indistinct idea which we have of some of the objects of the dialogue, give an air of solemnity and grandeur to it, no less imposing than the unappalled humanity of Prometheus, and the introduction of the daughter of Inachus, must have been flattering to the prejudices, the taste and ardent feelings of an Athenian audience. So attached was he to this subject,

subject, that he wrote three tragedies on it, two of which are now unfortunately lost. In his play of the Supplicants, we find him again treading the almost impervious paths of antiquity. I adduce this performance with particular satisfaction, not only as it favours the position which I have just laid down, but as an additional argument for our reliance on the candid testimony of Æschylus. Danaus, an Egyptian, is said to have established a colony in Greece, and transmitted the kingdom of Argos to his posterity. Agreeable as this account might have been to antient tradition, it certainly was by no means so to the self love and national prejudices of the Greeks; just the reverse. However, we find that no consideration of that nature prevented Æschylus from giving this event to his countrymen just as it was. He has accordingly thrown this migration into a dramatic form; and the arrival of Danaus, and the supplications of his daughters, form the subject of the play. The poet in this, as in other instances, has adhered then exactly to tradition; his general integrity cannot be impeached, and indeed his strict and delicate observation of manners\*, and the consonance of his testimony to that of the best historians, where it has been found necessary to compare them, are particularly acknowledged by the most respectable authors.

THE time of the celebrated migrations from Greece is well ascertained, and Thucydides expressly says that the Grecians did

\* As in the Persians, where in the account given to Atossa of the flight of the Persians, their worship of the earth and sky is particularly noticed. See Dr. Potter's incomparable translation.

not engage at all in regular colonization until long after the Trojan war. However, it is asserted by some that the Trojans were a colony from Greece, and settled there, according to tradition, about two hundred years before the Trojan war. Now the language of the mother country is generally, indeed almost invariably, adopted by her colonists. Is it not then a singular circumstance that Æschylus should in the most unequivocal manner mention Troy as a city speaking a language different from that of Greece? Whether a tradition of this nature, unsupported by any great historical authority that I know of, is entirely to overbalance the plain and unbiassed testimony of Æschylus, may reasonably be questioned. The account of Dardanus, from whom the Trojans were said to be descended, is certainly given by an excellent author\* and admirable critic; but it is almost lost in poetic fable, and unconnected with any proof whatever. Let us see what it amounts to: Atlas, the first king of Arcadia, had seven daughters; Jupiter married one of them, and had two sons, Jasus and Dardanus: A great deluge which took place in Arcadia separated the brothers, and the family of Dardanus migrated to Asia, where they settled in that country, which was afterwards called Phrygia. Jasus, it seems, when in Samothrace, paid his addresses to the goddess Ceres, and in return for his affiduities was struck dead by lightning; a very common mode amongst the ladies of the heathen mythology of getting rid of an importunate lover. After stating these and some other particulars of equal importance and authenticity, he (Dionysius) says, "I have now made it evidently appear that the Trojans are descended from the

\* Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

"Greeks."

"Greeks." Whether they were or not it is impossible at this distance of time to pronounce with any degree of certainty ; but the Trojans were a mixture of Greeks and Phrygians, say some authors. If the Hymn to Venus is allowed to be genuine (and some of the most penetrating critics never denied its authenticity) it will appear, from the authority of Homer himself, that the Trojans and Phrygians spoke different languages. This difference is taken notice of in the Hymn to Venus, not in the Iliad; a circumstance which destroys the force of that argument which is drawn from the general silence of Homer as to the languages of the contending nations. If the Hymn to Venus had been lost, few perhaps would have thought of assigning different languages to the Trojans and Phrygians ; the general inference from the Iliad would have been, that they were the same. If, therefore, Homer is totally silent in the latter poem as to the language of Greece and Troy, he is equally so as to that of Troy and Phrygia ; and yet in another place we have his own words to prove that the last-mentioned countries did not speak the same tongue. Virgil, says Mr. Wood, always confounds the Trojans and Phrygians, and represents them as one people, when in fact they were by no means so. If such an accurate observer of Homer has fallen into this error, what may not other authors have done ? In a question, therefore, where there is so much doubt, so much confusion, so much uncertainty on the one hand, and a respectable and evidently impartial authority on the other, to which side ought we most to incline ? The extent of the language of the Greeks, or of Grecian colonization, does not come exactly within the scope of the present enquiry. That their language was very generally diffused at the earliest periods is certain.

Chios, in the *Aegean Sea*, is mentioned by Homer as the place of his residence; and from the account which Herodotus gives of the auxiliaries of Xerxes, there is every reason to imagine that some of those nations from whence that monarch drew assistance were of Greek extraction. That the Grecian language was unknown to Troy in every period of its history cannot be at all conceived; but that it was common to both countries at the time of the Trojan war, may, from the authority of *Aeschylus*, admit of some degree of question. The passage in Agamemnon cannot with much facility be passed over. But in this I may be mistaken. No satisfactory reason, however, in my humble opinion, can be assigned for its insertion, if (as has been already suggested) *Aeschylus* did not conceive it necessary to the historical accuracy of his performance; and that he was eminently qualified to decide with tolerable certainty as to this, and similar subjects, the whole tenor of his compositions evidently proves.

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Page 57, Line 14, *They express their surprize that a foreigner, &c.]* The literal translation from the original is—“ But I am surprized that you, brought “ up beyond the sea, *in a city that uses a different tongue*, should be able, &c.”

*Some*

*Some of the Passages alluded to in the foregoing Observations are in the Original as follows:*

*Clytemnestra.* Αλλ᾽ εἴπερ ἐσὶ μὴ χελιδόνος δίκην  
Αγνῶτα φωνὴν Βάρβαρον κεκτημένη.

*Clytemnestra.* Εἰ δὲ αἴσυνήμων ὅσα μὴ δεχῃ λόγον  
Σὺδ ἀντὶ φωνῆς φράζε παρεάνω χερὶ.

*Chorus.* Ερμηνέως ἔοικεν η ἔνη τορῆ  
Δεῖσθαι. —————

*Chorus.* ————— Θαυμαῖς δέ σε  
Πόντε πέραν τραφεῖσαν ἀλλόθρεν πόλιν  
Κυρεῖν λέγουσαν ὥσπερ εἴ παρεσάτεις.

*Cassandra.* Καὶ μὴν ἄγαν γε Ἑλλην' ἐπίσαμαι φάτιν.